



Having a PLN is my way of taking control of my professional development and staying current on school library issues, Web 2.0 tools, lesson ideas, new products, conferences, books, and finding answers to the questions I didn't even know to ask.

My Crazy Road to Finding My PLN

Kelly Werthmuller

MrsW80@gmail.com

Being a school librarian can be a very lonely job. That is a reality I didn't expect. The school librarian is always surrounded by people. How could she be lonely? Honestly, though, no one else in my building "spoke" library—no one to share my successes, no one who would understand my challenges, no one to help guide me or tell me when I screwed up, and no one to vent to or with whom I could talk through problems.

I desperately needed (and still need) allies. My first real "tribe" member was a book-vendor representative. She is amazing and a wonderful resource that I am not sure enough people take advantage of. She understands my colleagues and my challenges; her job is to stay current with libraries; and she celebrates with me. She was the beginning of my PLN before I had any idea what that meant.

To me, having a PLN (personal learning network) means surrounding myself with people who will help me Think, Create, Share, and Grow. It means not only having people who are like me and will understand what I am talking about, but also having people with whom I can clash, therefore, learn from—through frustration comes creativity. Having a PLN is my way of taking control of my professional development and staying current on school library issues, Web 2.0 tools, lesson ideas, new products, conferences, books, and finding answers to the questions I didn't even know to ask.

My first conscious step toward creating my own PLN was after meeting "The Daring Librarian" Gwyneth Jones at the Midwest Education Technology Conference. She became my idol and who I want to be when I grow up. I started

following her blog on my Google Reader. Then I researched a few of the people she was following, and I found the same names kept popping up. I then began following people Gwyneth was following and all of *Library Journal's* 2011 Movers and Shakers.

After following all of these people, I found that the key to success for me was keeping my list of blogs manageable by deleting the ones that did not help me. I still get overwhelmed sometimes, especially if I have not read my blogs in a while, but I simply start over. If I miss a great idea, I am sure that it will come back around.

I have found that I like using Twitter on a daily basis. I follow many of the same people whose blogs I monitor, but I also follow a few other people, as well as many companies, vendors, and other

libraries. I find that Twitter is manageable and points me to blog entries and other articles that I really need to read. I don't usually go back to read the days I miss. The idea is to make my life easier and give me new ideas, not to overwhelm me. I want all of the knowledge, but I also want to keep my sanity.

Getting involved with ALA has started a new part of my PLN. I am one of ALA's 2012 Class of Emerging Leaders. Many of these people are not in school libraries, so they offer a different perspective on my problems or questions. The networking at Midwinter Meeting, on ALA Connect, and at Annual Conference has been amazing this year. Learning about AASL's Learning4Life has reinforced my awareness of my need to continue to Think, Create, Share, and Grow.

While I know that we are all very busy people, I must say that the little time that I take every week to keep up with my "experts" saves time in the long run. Keeping up with my PLN also gives me tons of resources to quickly forward to teachers in my school.

My next steps are to make my PLN more interactive. I have been too "stalker-like" with my PLN: mostly watching and not much contributing. I was initially very overwhelmed and humbled by the amount I've learned from these people. I want to be brave enough to share my thoughts, even if someone else already had a similar thought or if I am wrong or don't know everything on the topic. I think that so many

I think that so many of us do not share our successes because we think someone out there has done even better. But I am going to remember there are also people who have not tried yet and might need some inspiration that I could provide.

of us do not share our successes because we think someone out there has done even better. But I am going to remember there are also people who have not tried yet and might need some inspiration that I could provide. I don't have all the answers, but someone in my "Geek Tribe" does have the answer. I just have to be a good librarian and be able to find that resource, and then share my results!

Here are a few resources to help you get started:

- My Twitter handle: @mrsw80
- My school library's website: www.shimmeringlyawesome.com (newly launched and in need of work—all suggestions welcome!)
- My e-mail address: mrsw80@gmail.com

On Twitter try #tlchat, #edchat, #edtech hashtags, or Google "education twitter hashtags" to find one that fits your personal needs.

The AASL website contains a wealth of resources. Don't forget to check out these resources:

- eCOLLAB: www.ala.org/aasl/ecollab

- Learning4Life: www.ala.org/aasl/guidelinesandstandards/learning4life
- Lesson Plan Database: <http://aasl.jesandco.org>
- Some of the blogs I recommend:
- www.freeteach4teachers.com: A great place to find resources, but it can be a little overwhelming!
- www.thedaringlibrarian.com: A fun and educational blog by Gwyneth Jones, middle school librarian and innovator, that I find inspiring.
- <http://willrichardson.com>: A thought-provoking writer, Will Richardson blogs about and advocates for educational reform, including taking advantage of Web 2.0 tools for learning.
- www.onlinecollege.org/2012/07/10/100-best-blogs-school-librarians: I follow twenty on this list of one hundred best blogs for school librarians. (Three of my PLN members told me about this list while I was writing this article.)

Kelly Werthmuller has been working at Brittany Woods Middle School in St. Louis Missouri for ten years—the last five in the library. She is one of ALA's 2012 Class of Emerging Leaders, is a blog follower, and is always trying to learn.

AASL

Visit the Learning4Life website: www.ala.org/aasl/guidelinesandstandards/learning4life to find AASL's learning standards and program guidelines to empower 21st-century learners.

Copyright of Knowledge Quest is the property of American Library Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.